

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

EA Number: **OR-056-99-271**
Title: **NW SEDGEWICK AVENUE FENCE CONSTRUCTION**
BLM Office: **Prineville District**
Resource Area: **Deschutes**

I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

The primary purpose of the project is to reduce motorized vehicle access to BLM managed lands from NW Sedgewick Avenue, west of Almeter Way and approximately 1 ½ miles west of Terrebonne. This access contributes to soil erosion, damage to vegetation, and is associated with illegal dumping on public lands.

Local landowner complaints regarding vandalism and trespass, dumping, and noise resulted in Deschutes County authorizing (with BLM concurrence) a gate constructed from the northeast corner of lot 2 - Westwood Subdivision, across NW Sedgewick Avenue. This gate was constructed in 1982 and will be referred to in this document as the “1982 gate”. The authorization for this gate required that pedestrian/non-motorized access be provided at all times, but that the gate could be locked at night to prevent vehicle access to the dead-end portion of NW Sedgewick Avenue. During the day, when the gate is left open, motorists could drive past the gate and access BLM lands along the north side and west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue. Further conflicts between local residents and public land users have resulted in a landowner request for fencing to be installed on the north side and west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue, west of the 1982 gate. This would block motorized vehicle access to BLM managed lands from NW Sedgewick Avenue.

The original alignment of NW Sedgewick Avenue turns south into private property before entering public lands. Therefore, when the last property on NW Sedgewick Avenue was developed and fenced, the original access road into public lands was blocked. The original alignment still exists, and provides a landowner a private access road into BLM managed lands.

PROPOSAL OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project are to : 1) reduce motorized vehicle access associated with illegal dumping along NW Sedgewick Avenue; 2) reduce conflicts between public land users and adjacent landowners; 3) prevent the development of user created trails or disturbed areas at the end of, or along the north side of NW Sedgewick Avenue; and 4) provide clear and accurate information for visitors to BLM managed lands in the area.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

The proposed actions considered in this Environmental Assessment (EA) are included below. Previous decisions by Deschutes County to authorize the “1982 Gate” across NW Sedgewick Avenue will not be addressed in this EA. The proposed action and all alternatives would be in conformance with the Brothers LaPine Resource Management Plan / Environmental Impact Statement (Record of Decision - July, 1989), available for review at Prineville District BLM, 3050 NE 3rd Street, Prineville, Oregon.

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action)

Fence would be constructed along the north side and west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue, west of the 1982 gate. Motorized vehicle access into BLM lands from NW Sedgewick Avenue would be closed. Pedestrian/non-motorized access to BLM managed lands would be provided east of the 1982 gate. Before reaching the 1982 gate across NW Sedgewick Avenue, visitors would enter a pedestrian gate on the north side of NW Sedgewick Avenue, adjacent to the Oregon Department of Transportation material site gate. From this gate, visitors would travel north on the material site access road, then west on an existing dirt road/trail that parallels NW Sedgewick Avenue and connects to the user created network of trails on BLM managed lands.

The proposed action includes construction of approximately 750 feet of barbed wire fence (three wire fence with metal posts at 16 foot spacing); installation of a pedestrian gate at the material site access road; placing about six trail markers along first 1/4 mile of the access route, and posting a public access sign at the pedestrian gate.

Alternative 2

Fence would be constructed along the north side and west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue. To access public lands, visitors would travel west on NW Sedgewick Avenue, pass through the existing 1982 gate, then through a second gate provided at the west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue. In authorizing a permit for the 1982 gate, Deschutes County required that an opening in the gate/fence be made to allow for unimpeded access by pedestrian/non-motorized traffic at all times. The existing opening would need to be widened by approximately two to three feet to accommodate equestrians. The trail route used in Alternative 2 would also connect with the user created network of trails on BLM managed lands.

Alternative 2 includes the construction of approximately 750 feet of barbed wire fence (three wire fence with metal posts at 16 foot spacing); widening the existing pedestrian/non-motorized access at the 1982 gate; installation of a pedestrian non-motorized gate at the west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue; construction of approximately 50 feet of new trail; posting of a public access sign at the 1982 gate and at the west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue, and installation of signage indicating the access trail route.

Alternative 3 (No-Action)

No fences would be located along the north and west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue. Motorized and non-motorized access to public lands would be available from the west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue during the daytime. The 1982 gate could be locked to close vehicle access in the evening as per the 1982 Deschutes County gate permit.

The no-action alternative would involve no construction of fences. The existing pedestrian/non-motorized access at the 1982 gate across NW Sedgewick Avenue would be improved to allow access to equestrians.

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

General Location

The proposed project area is located about 1 ½ miles west of the community of Terrebonne, along NW Sedgewick Avenue west of the NW Sedgewick/Almeter intersection (See Map 1, attached). The project area is located in Township 14 South, Range 13 East, Sections 18 and 19.

NW Sedgewick Avenue provides one of several access points to approximately four square miles of BLM managed lands located south of Lower Bridge Road in northern Deschutes County. The area has been heavily impacted by illegal dumping of trash. The project area also contains: a large area where topsoil has been illegally excavated near the transmission line ROW; many cut trees; rows of brush piles; and a trench that has been dug adjacent to the west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue.

The BLM managed lands in the project area are used in a variety of ways. These include:

- A materials site (cinder pit);
- A electrical transmission line (aligned north-south) located about 1/4-mile west of NW Sedgewick Avenue and;
- Recreational use, including Off-Highway Vehicle Use, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, target shooting, and hunting.

Access/Transportation - Three roads provide public access to BLM managed lands in the vicinity of the proposed project. These roads include: 1) NW Sedgewick Avenue; 2) Lower Bridge Road; and 3) Northwest Way Avenue (via NW Odem). NW Sedgewick Avenue provides the most direct access to BLM managed lands from the community of Terrebonne. NW Odem Avenue provides access about ½ mile south of NW Sedgewick Avenue, while Lower Bridge Road provides access about 1 ½ miles to the north of the project area. Of these access roads, Lower Bridge Road is an arterial and carries the most traffic, at considerably higher vehicle speeds. Odem Avenue is classified by Deschutes County as a “collector road”, and likely carries more traffic than NW Sedgewick Avenue, which is classified as a “local road”. Both NW

Sedgewick Avenue and NW Odem Avenue are 2-lane roads with little or no paved shoulders. Discussions with local residents indicate that NW Sedgewick Avenue provides a safer route for pedestrians and bicyclists who are traveling to BLM lands from Terrebonne.

Soils - There are no perennial or intermittent streams in the project area. The project area is located on the lower south-facing slopes of a small hill. The soils at the immediate project site are classified as Stukel-Deschutes-Rock outcrop, which have a shallow to moderate soil depth. Re-establishment of native vegetation is very slow on these soils, once a site is disturbed. The soils on the slope above NW Sedgewick Avenue are classified as Tetherow-Clovkamp complex, which is a sandy loam overlaying cinders. These cinders are being excavated by the Oregon Department of Transportation, which operates a cinder pit on BLM managed lands north of NW Sedgewick Avenue.

Vegetation - The vegetation in the area consists of western juniper (*Juniperus occidentalis*). Shrubs include sagebrush and rabbit brush, while the understory consists of a low density of mixed forbs, bunchgrasses, and cheatgrass. The only special status plant species that would be suspected of occurring in the project area is *Astragalus peckii*, Peck's Milkvetch; however, no populations of these plants have been found during the course of inventories in nearby areas.

Wildlife - No threatened or endangered wildlife species are known to occur within the project area. A variety of raptors and songbirds are present in the project area. Deer and small mammals also inhabit the project area.

Cultural Resources - Cultural resources have not been found and are not expected in the project area.

Recreation - The area is used for a variety of recreational activities including hiking, dog walking, mountain biking, motorcycle and all-terrain vehicle use, and horseback riding. Recreational use appears to be mainly from local area residents (Terrebonne), and not from a wider area. Recreational activities occur year round, depending on the weather conditions. Public land in the immediate area has been used for illegal dumping, target shooting and late night partying.

A network of user created trails and roads exists in the area. The area is designated as "Open" in the Brothers/LaPine Resource Management Plan, meaning that vehicles can travel throughout the area on and off existing roads and trails. Due to the many access points from Lower Bridge Road, the road/trail system expands annually. The area is not under any temporary closures to motorized vehicles or shooting.

Visual - The surrounding area is mainly rural residential development, with scattered houses located along NW Sedgewick Avenue, Almeter Way, and Northwest Way. Two houses are located on the south side of NW Sedgewick Avenue across from the proposed fence construction. The cinder pit on the north side of the project area can be seen from Terrebonne (in the vicinity of NW 19th Street). However, the southern slopes of the hill that comprise the project area are naturally appearing when seen from Terrebonne and from the more immediate surrounding area.

IV. IMPACTS

The following impacts are described considering the application of mitigation measures and monitoring as prescribed in the Brothers/La Pine RMP as well as those identified specifically for this project.

Soils & Vegetation

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) - Construction of the fence would result in some compaction of soils and damage to vegetation during construction. However, the area along the north side of NW Sedgewick Avenue is already highly impacted by vehicles leaving the paved road and driving across public lands at many locations. The designation and signing of a non-motorized access route would likely reduce the impacts to soils and vegetation in the project area, particularly since the proposed access route would use existing roads and trails.

Alternative 2 - The construction of the fence would create the same degree of impacts as the proposed action. Under Alternative 2, a short length of trail would need to be constructed and signed at the west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue, which would destroy some vegetation and disturb soils. However, this area is currently highly impacted by past vehicle use, dumping, and the creation of a large berm and trench at the west end NW Sedgewick Avenue.

Alternative 3 (No Action) - Soils on the south facing slopes of the hill would continue to be disturbed by motorized vehicles entering public lands at many different locations along the north side of NW Sedgewick Avenue. The continued disturbance to soils on this south facing slope would also reduce the density of understory grasses and shrubs. This disturbance may also contribute to the spread of noxious weeds in the project area.

Wildlife

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) - A new fence would create an additional obstacle for deer and other animals to negotiate. This impact would be partially mitigated by a fence designed to ease deer passage. Wires would be 18", 28", and 40" inches from the ground.

Alternative 2 - A new fence would create an additional obstacle for deer and other animals to negotiate. This impact would be partially mitigated by a fence designed to ease deer passage. Wires would be 18", 28", and 40" inches from the ground.

Alternative 3 (No Action) - There would be no direct impact to wildlife if the fence was not installed. Impacts to wildlife may increase through continued, uncontrolled vehicle access in the area; however vehicle use would continue to occur from other access points via the existing road network within the public lands to the west.

Recreation

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) - Motorized vehicle access to public lands via NW Sedgewick Avenue would be blocked. Local residents wishing to drive on public lands in the area would have to go to access points along Lower Bridge Road (1 ½ miles to the north), or other access points about the same distance to the south. Pedestrian/non-motorized access would remain at both NW Sedgewick Avenue and Northwest Way, offering local residents a choice as to which roads they use (walking or bicycling) to reach public lands. Instead of traveling past private residences and through the 1982 gate, visitors would enter public lands through a signed gate next to the material site access road. Conflicts with local landowners would be reduced by rerouting the access trail away from the dead-end of NW Sedgewick Avenue. The proposed access route into public lands would climb up the lower slopes of a small hill, providing some degree of variety and challenge, as well as panoramic views of the surroundings. However, this access trail would follow existing dirt roads that pass by the cinder pit. The pit is typically used on weekdays for a month during the summer, and during this period, dust, noise, and truck traffic from these operations may impact recreationists using the adjacent trail. Visitors who can't hike up the hill on the proposed access route could continue to access BLM lands in the area via Northwest Way, which offers flatter terrain.

Alternative 2 - Motorized vehicle access to public lands in the project area would be blocked. Local residents wishing to drive on public lands in the area would have to go to access points along Lower Bridge Road (1 ½ miles to the north), or other access points about the same distance to the south. Pedestrian/non-motorized access would remain at both NW Sedgewick Avenue and Northwest Way, offering local residents a choice as to which roads they use (walking or bicycling) to reach public lands. Visitors would have to pass through the 1982 gate, then through a second gate at the west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue. The presence of two gates would tend to discourage public access and confuse visitors to public lands. Under this alternative it is likely that conflicts between recreationists and local residents would remain. However, visitors would not be impacted by noise or dust during periods when the material site is in operation.

Alternative 3 (No Action) - The area would continue to have multiple vehicle access points along the north side of NW Sedgewick Avenue, and the past problems with dumping, partying, and expanding road/trail networks would continue. Conflicts between recreationists and local residents would continue, with visitors to public lands parking behind the 1982 gate on NW Sedgewick Avenue, and potentially getting "locked in" by the adjacent landowner. Local residents wishing to hike, bicycle or ride horses would continue to have a choice between using NW Sedgewick Avenue or Northwest Way to reach public lands.

Visual

Alternative 1 (Proposed Action) - Approximately 750 feet of new fence would be constructed along the north side and west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue. The fence would be constructed with green metal T-posts to minimize visual impacts. The proposed fence would not introduce a built feature in a naturally appearing environment, since it would be viewed along with the old NW Sedgewick Avenue

dead-end and several houses. The signed access trail would provide for long-distance, panoramic views of the surrounding area, including views of Smith Rocks and the Cascade range. However, the signed trail route would also include brief, close range views of the cinder pit.

Alternative 2 - Approximately 750 feet of new fence would be constructed along the north side and west end of NW Sedgewick Avenue. The fence would be constructed with green metal T-posts to minimize visual impacts. The proposed fence would not introduce a built feature in a naturally appearing environment, since it would be viewed along with the old NW Sedgewick Avenue dead-end and several houses. No long range, panoramic views would be available from the access route, which would pass closely by the existing houses and through two different gates.

Alternative 3 (No Action) - No fence would be constructed; however, the area would continue to be degraded by multiple vehicle routes along the north side of NW Sedgewick Avenue.

Mitigation Measures, Residual Impacts, and Cumulative Impacts

Mitigation would occur as detailed above under the Wildlife and Visuals sections. The proposed action would not be expected to produce any cumulative impacts, due to the small scale of the project and the large number of vehicle access points that exist along Lower Bridge Road that lead into this area of public lands.

V. NO IMPACT ITEMS

The following critical elements were considered, but will not be addressed because they would either not be affected or do not exist in the project area:

1. Agricultural Lands, Prime or Unique
2. Air Quality
3. Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
4. Environmental Justice
5. Floodplains
6. Cultural Resources
7. Native American Religious Concerns
8. Paleontological Resources
9. Riparian/Wetlands
10. Threatened or Endangered Species
11. Wastes, Hazardous or Solid
12. Water Quality
13. Wild and Scenic Rivers
14. Wilderness

VI. PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED

Persons and Agencies Consulted

Peter Lineville-Weins, area resident
Fred Hanson, area resident
Bill Henry, Deschutes County Roads Department
Dave Neyes, Oregon Department of Transportation,

Preparers (BLM)

Greg Currie, Recreation Planner
Steve Castillo, Forester
Dale Ekman, Fuels Specialist
Ron Gregory, Archaeologist
Ron Halvorson, Botanist
Michelle McSwain, Hydrologist

Paul Schmidt, Wildlife Biologist
Teal Purrington, Rangeland Management Specialist
Ron Wortman, Realty Specialist

NEPA Requirements met:

Marci Todd, Assistant Area Manager

Date

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

I have reviewed this environmental assessment including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant impacts. I have determined that the proposed action, with the mitigation measures described, will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the approved land use plan.

Authorized Official

Date